

COVID program delivers 1 billion doses to poorer countries

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A shipment of COVID-19 vaccines distributed by the COVAX Facility arrives in Abidjan, Ivory Coast, Friday Feb. 25, 2021. The World Health Organization says a U.N.-backed program shipping coronavirus vaccines to many poor countries has now delivered 1 billion doses, but that milestone "is only a reminder of the work that remains" after hoarding and stockpiling in rich countries. The U.N. health agency said Sunday, Jan. 16, 2022 that a shipment of 1.1 million COVID-19 vaccine doses to Rwanda this weekend included the billionth dose supplied via the COVAX program. Credit: AP Photo/Diomande

Ble Blonde, File

The World Health Organization said Sunday that a U.N.-backed program shipping coronavirus vaccines to many poor countries has now delivered 1 billion doses, but that milestone "is only a reminder of the work that remains" after hoarding and stockpiling in rich countries.

A shipment of 1.1 million COVID-19 [vaccine doses](#) to Rwanda on Saturday included the billionth dose supplied via the COVAX program, the U.N. health agency said.

WHO has long criticized unequal distribution of vaccines and called for manufacturers and other countries to prioritize COVAX. It said that, as of Thursday, 36 of its 194 [member countries](#) had vaccinated less than 10% of their population and 88 had vaccinated less than 40%.

The program has made deliveries to 144 countries so far, "but the work that has gone into this milestone is only a reminder of the work that remains," WHO said in a statement.

"COVAX's ambition was compromised by hoarding/stockpiling in [rich countries](#), catastrophic outbreaks leading to borders and supply being locked," it added. "And a lack of sharing of licenses, technology and know-how by [pharmaceutical companies](#) meant manufacturing capacity went unused."

At the end of December, WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus urged everyone to make a "[new year](#)'s resolution" to get behind a campaign to vaccinate 70% of countries' populations by the beginning of July.

In a newspaper interview published Sunday, Germany's new international development minister said she wants to use her country's presidency this year of the Group of Seven industrial nations to ensure that COVAX gets the resources it needs in 2022.

"Unfortunately, there are still too few countries participating in the financing of the global vaccination campaign," Svenja Schulze was quoted as telling the Funke newspaper group. "Alongside Sweden, Norway, Canada and the U.S., we are the ones who are giving most. The other industrial countries have significant ground to catch up."

Germany has said it donated 103 million doses to poorer countries last year and plans to donate another 75 million in 2022.

Schulze signaled that she wants to expand help for developing countries to produce vaccines themselves, with partnerships between companies to produce vaccines under license a favored aim.

Asked whether it would make sense to waive patents on COVID-19 patents, which Germany's previous government opposed, she replied: "I doubt that developing countries would get vaccines more easily if we waive the patents." The issue is only a small part of the production process, she argued.

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